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THE MILITANT

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 70/NO. 2 JANUARY 16, 2006

INSIDE

'My trench in fighting imperialism is Puerto Rico's independence'

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Bosses' profit drive killed coal miners in W. Virginia

Trapped after explosion, 12 of 13 miners die

BY RYAN SCOTT AND MARTY RESSLER

TALLMANSVILLE, West Virginia, January 4—Twelve coal miners were confirmed dead in the Sago Mine here by the early morning hours today. A 13th miner, 27-year-old Randal McCloy Jr., who had been trapped with his co-workers, survived and is now hospitalized in critical condition. The miners had been trapped 260 feet below the surface when an explosion occurred two days earlier as they were entering the mine to begin their shift.

This nonunion mine owned by the International Coal Group (ICG) has a long record of safety violations, having been cited 273 times over the past two years—208 of these in 2005, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). These included a number of roof collapses, inadequate roof supports, and dangerous buildups of flammable coal dust.

"Safety needs to be in the workers' hand," Ed Lipscond, an over-the-road trucker from Flemington, West Virginia, told the *Militant* January 3 outside the Sago Mine. "With the violations the company got, I can't figure out why they didn't shut the mine down. I've got four friends in there, and I came out here to support them and my community. These are the best paying jobs around. You can't raise a family on $6 an hour. When you don't have a union and you stand up for yourself, they get rid of you. We need to be united with a union to back us up and take up for us."

Families of the miners trapped underground were abused further by company and government officials after word spread among relatives of the trapped men gathered at a church late last night that through a "miracle" 12 of the 13

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AP photos/Bob Bird (top); Haraz Ghanbari (bottom)

Top: Sago coal mine near Tallmansville, West Virginia, where a powerful explosion on January 2 trapped 13 miners hundreds of feet underground. Bottom: Miners who are part of rescue teams prepare to enter the mine the next day. Rescuers found only one survivor and 12 miners dead by the end of the day.

N.Y. transit workers proud to have stood up to boss attacks

BY MICHAEL ITALIE AND ARRIN HAWKINS

NEW YORK—Nearly 34,000 bus and subway workers returned to work here December 23 following a three-day strike proud of their strength in standing up to company attacks on pensions, health coverage, and working conditions despite the Taylor law, which bans walkouts by public employees. "I'd go on strike again, right now, for a better contract," Anthony Dejesus, a bus driver for six years, told the *Militant* January 2 at the Michael J. Quill bus depot in Manhattan.

Under the Taylor law public workers in New York State who strike are liable for fines of two days' pay for each day off the job. Transit workers in this case may be slapped with fines of up to

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Wealthy Sunnis lead protests, jockey for posts in new U.S.-backed Iraqi regime

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—Hundreds of thousands of Sunni Arabs have demonstrated across Iraq to protest the outcome of the December 15 parliamentary elections. Leaders of electoral blocs with support among Sunnis and Shiites traveled to Iraq's northern autonomous region known as Iraqi Kurdistan to begin negotiations with the main Kurdish political parties. The latter have strengthened their fight for autonomy by ensuring that most Iraqi army units in the north are made up with members of the Kurdish pesh

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Faced with public workers strikes, Quebec gov't imposes concessions

BY BEVERLY BERNARDO

TORONTO—Tens of thousands of workers in health, education, and other government departments in Quebec walked off their jobs and took part in demonstrations and other actions to press their contract demands over the past several months. In face of these protests, the provincial Liberal government of Premier Jean Charest called a special session of Quebec's parliament December 15 and passed Law 142. The legislation imposed a contract on nearly 500,000 unionized public-sector workers.

The law includes the threat of stiff fines against the workers and their unions for any strikes during the life of the contract, which expires in 2010.

Marcel Massé, president of the Quebec Federation of Labor (FTQ), and Claudette Carbonneau, president of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN), both denounced the government's action as "totally unjustified." André Boisclair, recently elected

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Saturday, January 21 — New York City

THE WORLD CRISIS OF IMPERIALISM AND CONTRADICTORY DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOR VANGUARD

Marxism, or Why Join the Communist Movement

Speaker

Jack Barnes

National Secretary of the Socialist Workers Party

Reception: 3 p.m. **Program:** 4 p.m.

Food, Refreshments, Talk and Music: 7 p.m. 'til . . .

Location To Be Announced

Sunday, January 22, 9:30 a.m.—Meeting of Young Socialists

Sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialists New York (212-736-2540) and Newark (973-481-0077)

Also Inside:

Facing gov't indifference since Katrina, Gulf Coast fishermen fight for livelihood



Militant/ José Aravena

Jimmy Morgan, an oyster fisherman in Plaquemine Parish, Louisiana, November 29. The gov't appropriated $60 million to raise sunk boats, but he had to pay his own money to do job.

BY KARL BUTTS

PLAQUEMINE PARISH, Louisiana—Four months after Hurricane Katrina tore through this region near New Orleans, fishermen who lost boats and homes have seen little in the way of assistance. *Militant* reporters interviewed a number of small fishermen at marinas along the coast here November 29.

Kevin Drury and Rick Moreau have been shrimpers for 16 and 20 years, respectively. Drury and other members of his family had eight shrimp trawlers at the Venice marina. Their boats were some of the 1,500 that sunk when Katrina hit the marina. With a $1,000 monthly loan payment on his sunken boat, Drury said, "I can't sit back and wait" for the government to raise the sunk vessels.

He related how the parish authorities didn't want to give the fishermen a pass to get down to check on their boats. Even though it was a month since Katrina "we had to fight our way in," he said. "I was able to save the engines, my neighbors did too. But others lost theirs due to the time underwater."

Drury figured he needed $7,000 to get his boat fixed, which was cheap compared to others. The ice plant that shrimpers depend on was also destroyed. According to Alan Vaughn, a state extension agent in the parish, restoration of electricity is six months to a year away.

Many fishermen have applied for Small Business Administration loans. The agency told Drury's dad he didn't qualify. They told him he'd have to get a commercial loan, but Drury noted it's "hard to borrow when you have lost your home." Drury said he received the basic $2,000 and $2,350 from FEMA for those who evacuated. He said he has five kids 150 miles away in a Baton Rouge motel that FEMA is paying for through January 7. But he's having a hard time paying for their clothes, food, and other expenses.

"It's other fishermen who are helping us," Drury said. Acy Cooper, vice-president of the Louisiana Shrimp Association, told the *Militant* about fishermen from other parishes sending "truckloads of clothes and food."

The damage from the storm is compounded by low prices that processors are giving shrimp fishermen for their catch. "The shrimp dock sets the price. A 40–50 size shrimp used to bring $1.90, now the price is 90 cents to $1.00," Drury said. At the same time fuel costs have risen to $2.00 a gallon. Cooper said that shrimpers are trying to pressure the processing plant to raise the price.

At the Empire Marina here 1,000 oyster boats sunk during Rita and its predecessor, Katrina.

"My god do we need help down here," said Jimmy Morgan, 54, a third-generation oyster fisherman. "Right now I'm robbing Peter to pay Paul. I'm using flood insurance money for my home to fix my boat." His home in the hardest-hit southern half of the parish was flooded with 20 feet of water. "Losing my house is one thing, but losing my livelihood is something else," Morgan said.

He explained that the government appropriated $85 million to raise the sunk boats, but two months after the storms "there were two cranes sitting in the harbor doing nothing." He and three other fishermen raised $7,500 of their own money to hire a dragline and a tugboat to do the job. He thinks it'll cost him $12,000 to repair the damage.

"Oyster fishermen lost everything," said Morgan, who leases 100 acres of oyster bed from the government. Testifying before the House Resources Committee's fisheries subcommittee December 15, William Hogarth, head of the National Marine Fisheries Service, said that $104 million in Louisiana's oyster reefs and beds and coastal wetlands were destroyed by Katrina and Rita. Hogarth estimates losses in boats and equipment for Gulf Coast fishermen from the storms is as high as $1.2 billion.

Appeal to our readers

Since Hurricane Katrina last August, the *Militant* has spent over $7,500 to send reporters to the U.S. Gulf Coast to provide coverage like the article above. As this issue goes to press, 15 readers have contributed a total of $2,265 to cover travel and other reporting costs. Please continue to give generously. Send your contributions to the *Militant* at 306 W. 37th St., 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Anti-Cuba rightists caught with heavy weapons denied bail

BY DEBORAH LIATOS

MIAMI—A federal judge on December 9 rejected a second attempt by two rightists planning armed attacks against Cuba to win release on bail before their trial on illegal weapons and other charges. The trial has been set for May 8 in Ft. Lauderdale.

U.S. District Judge James Cohn upheld another judge's ruling denying bail for Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat. The two are charged with illegal possession of machine guns, assault rifles, a silencer, grenades, a grenade launcher, detonation devices, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Some of the weapons had serial numbers erased.

Alvarez and Mitat have been charged with storing the firearms in a Broward County apartment complex owned by Alvarez, a wealthy real estate developer here who came to the United States from Cuba in 1959, soon after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Both men, who were arrested in November, pleaded not guilty to the charges in Miami federal court December 13.

In May, Alvarez helped Luis Posada Carriles, a CIA-trained mass murderer, emerge from hiding before his arrest for entering the country illegally.

Posada Carriles was arrested in Miami in May and is being held in El Paso, Texas, awaiting an immigration judge's ruling on whether he will be deported. In October, an immigration judge in El Paso ruled that he will not be extradited to Venezuela. Cuban-born Posada Carriles is a naturalized Venezuelan citizen who is wanted by both the Cuban and Venezuelan governments for planning the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people in 1976, and a string of hotel bombings in Havana in 1997–98. He has a long record of carrying out violent activity against the Cuban Revolution. Posada Carriles escaped a Venezuelan prison in 1985 while awaiting trial. The Venezuelan government has petitioned for his extradition.

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New Zealand: Send NZ$50 to P.O. Box 3025, Auckland, New Zealand.

Australia: Send A$50 to P.O. Box 164 Campsie, NSW 2194, Australia.

Pacific Islands: Send NZ$50 to P.O. Box 3025, Auckland, New Zealand.

Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant*'s views. These are expressed in editorials.

Quebec public workers

Continued from front page
leader of the pro-sovereignty Parti Quebecois (PQ), said he will not reopen the contracts imposed by the Liberal government if the PQ is returned to office in the next Quebec provincial elections expected in 2007 or 2008.

Without a contract since June 30, 2003, the public-sector unions in the FTQ and CSN formed a common front to strengthen their fight for a pact. Wages were at the center of the conflict. The unions were demanding wage increases of 12.5 percent over three years. Law 142 imposed the government's initial offer of 8 percent over six years. This includes a wages freeze in the first two years and 2 percent increases in each of the four subsequent years.

Since last June, public sector workers have carried out a series of rotating strikes and rallies throughout Quebec to win support for their fight and force the government to negotiate. On December 13, 80,000 government workers in the Montreal area walked out. The next day tens of thousands of workers in other regions around Quebec held marches and rallies blocking key highways.

During its December 15 special session, parliament also passed Law 124, which institutes changes to the system of child-care centers (CPEs) in Quebec. Opponents of the law—including CPE workers, trade union federations, and many parents—said the law will raise the cost of child care and make it less available. Some 12,000 opponents of Law 124 from many regions of Quebec demonstrated in Montreal November 27.

In 1997 the PQ government introduced CPEs at a cost of $5 per day. The Liberal government has since raised it to $7 a day.

The three Communist League candidates for the House of Commons in the January 23 federal election—Michel Prairie in Toronto-Centre, John Steele in Eglinton-Lawrence, and Beverly Bernardo in Parkdale–High Park (all Toronto-area ridings, or electoral districts)—released a statement calling for the repeal of these antilabor laws.

"Laws 142 and 124 are a blow not only to workers in Quebec but to workers across the country," said the statement. "The antiunion legislation is part of the drive of the employers to make working people pay for the growing crisis of their profit system. The entire labor movement should demand the Quebec government repeal these anti-worker laws and accept a negotiated settlement with the Quebec government workers' unions based on their just demands."

Communist League candidates in Canada campaign with working-class platform



Militant/Michel Dugré

Communist League candidate Beverly Bernardo (left) campaigns January 3 on the streets of Toronto. A garment worker, she is running in the Parkdale–High Park riding (electoral district) in the January 23 federal elections in Canada.

UK firefighters call for inquiry into oil depot blaze

BY JOYCE FAIRCHILD

LONDON—The National Fire Brigades Union has called for a public inquiry into a huge fire that erupted in mid-December in an oil storage depot in southern England. Described as the biggest in Europe in 60 years, the blaze forced 2,000 residents from their homes. Schools and motorways were closed.

The fire started December 11 at the Buncefield fuel depot in Hemel Hempstead, in Hertfordshire, when 20 oil tanks, each holding 3 million gallons of fuel, exploded. Some 600 firefighters fought the blaze for nearly three days. Forty-three people were hospitalized. The depot is situated near an industrial estate with 400 businesses.

Calling for a public inquiry, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) said in a statement, "Hertfordshire fire authority was woefully ill prepared to deal with anything but the most minor oil fire." It condemned the lack of specialist foam spraying vehicles, stocks of foam, or officers trained to tackle a major oil fire.

In the two months before the fire the FBU and local residents had been campaigning against proposed cuts to the fire and rescue service in Hertfordshire. On November 11 some 200 people protested at a meeting with fire chiefs against the scheduled closing of Bovingdon Fire Station in April. In October, 100 firefighters and others marched through nearby Watford to oppose cuts to nighttime cover.

The Buncefield depot, operated by Total and Texaco, is a major distribution terminal for storing oil, petrol, and kerosene that supplies Heathrow and Luton airports.

On December 14 the government's Health and Safety Executive said it would begin an investigation.

Tensions rise between U.S., Canadian governments

BY MICHEL DUGRÉ

TORONTO—Tensions between the governments of Canada and the United States resurfaced recently, fueled by Ottawa's inability to roll back tariffs on Canadian lumber and other goods exported to the United States. Washington has maintained such measures for years partly as punishment for the Canadian rulers' refusal to join the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" in Iraq. On the other hand, politicians here have increasingly used "anti-Americanism" in the campaign prior to the January 23 federal elections.

David Wilkins, the U.S. ambassador to Canada, publicly complained December 13 about such "America-bashing." Constant criticisms of "your No. 1 trading partner" could "hurt the Canada-US relationship," he said. Addressing the most contentious issues in Canada-U.S. relations, Wilkins said, "Freedom is on the march" in Iraq, where Ottawa has refused to send troops. Responding to recent comments by Prime Minister Paul Martin blaming Washington for not signing the Kyoto agreement, Wilkins also defended the U.S. government's record on environmental issues.

On the dispute over softwood lumber, which is the biggest irritant for Canadian rulers, Wilkins noted that the U.S. Commerce Department had just reduced duties on Canadian timber.

Martin responded to Wilkins the following day. Speaking to the press at a softwood lumber mill in British Columbia, he stated, "We're not going to let up until Canadian companies are repaid the tariffs that were improperly collected on our lumber and until our neighbors respect the fact that free trade must be fair trade."

Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper called the U.S. ambassador's intervention "inappropriate."

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton said Martin is "whipping up the rhetoric" because his Liberal government has failed to make any gains for Canada in the softwood lumber issue.

Canada's trade with the United States is vital for the Canadian rulers. It is responsible for more than half of the country's gross domestic product and represents roughly 80 percent of Canada's exports, while less than a quarter of U.S. exports go to Canada. Softwood lumber is one of Canada's largest exports to the United States, representing $6.8 billion per year.

In 2002 Washington imposed a 27 percent import duty on Canadian lumber. The rate has since been lowered to take account of the rise of the Canadian dollar. Washington, however, has rejected rulings against this tariff by a special panel set up to referee cross-border disputes under the North American Free Trade Agreement. U.S. Customs has collected $5 billion in duties from Canada's lumber exporters since May 2002.

Such pressure and the developing depression of the world capitalist market have driven the forest industry here into a crisis.

More than 7,000 workers have lost their jobs in paper mill shutdowns across Canada in recent months. Since the beginning of the federal election campaign in early December, at least two companies have announced new mill closures. At the same time, the bosses profit drive is deadly for workers. Forty forest workers died last year in British Columbia alone, a province with a population of about 4 million people.

The growing competition from other imperialist powers, especially Washington, is a major factor behind the incapacity of Canada's ruling billionaire families to stabilize their rule. The Liberal Party, the only party that could still pretend to be a national party, is losing significant ground in Quebec (see article elsewhere on this page).

MILITANT LABOR FORUMS

ALABAMA

Birmingham

The West Virginia Mine Disaster and the Fight for Mine Safety and Union Power. Speaker: Clay Dennison, Socialist Workers Party and member of United Mine Workers of America Local 2133. Fri., Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m. *3029A Bessemer Rd. Tel: (205) 780-0021.*

IOWA

Des Moines

Stop U.S. and Israeli Threats against Iran! Fri., Jan. 13. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. *3707 Douglas Ave. Tel: (515) 255-1707.*

NEW YORK

Manhattan

Bosses' Profit Drive Behind West Virginia Mine Disaster. Fri., Jan. 13. Dinner, 7:00 p.m.; program 8:00 p.m. Donation: $5 dinner, $5 program. *306 W. 37th St., 10th floor (north elevators). Tel: (212) 629-6649.*

PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia

Malcolm X, the Lessons of the Civil Rights Movement. Fri., Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m. Donation: $5. *188 W. Wyoming Ave. Tel: (215) 455-2682.*

TEXAS

Houston

Coal Mine Disaster in West Virginia: Result of Bosses' Deadly Drive for Profits. Speaker: Steve Warshell, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m. *4800 W. 34th St., Suite C-51A. Tel: (713) 869-6550.*

CANADA

Toronto

It's Not Who You're Against, It's What You're For. Speakers: Communist League candidates for the January 23 federal election. Beverly Bernardo in Parkdale–High Park, Michel Prairie in Toronto-Centre, John Steele in Eglinton-Lawrence. Sun., Jan. 15. Program, 2:00 p.m.; fund-raising dinner to follow. *2238 Dundas St. West, Suite #201. Tel: (416) 535-9140.*

SWEDEN

Stockholm

Malcolm X and His Relevance Today. Fri., Jan. 13, 7:00 p.m. *Bildhuggarvägen 17 Johanneshov Tel: (08) 316933.*

UNITED KINGDOM

London

The Truth About Yugoslavia: How London, Washington, and Other Imperialists Fueled the Slaughter. Speaker: Celia Pugh, Communist League. Fri., Jan 13. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. Donation: Dinner £3, program £3. *120 Bethnal Green Road, 1st floor (Entrance on Brick Lane). Tel: (020) 7613-2466.*

Bank workers strike in New Zealand



Militant/Felicity Coggan

Hundreds of bank workers on strike against Westpac protest in Christchurch, New Zealand, December 23 demanding better wages and an end to "sales targets" regime.

BY RUTH GRAY AND CALLUM WILLIAMSON

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand—Some 1,500 members of the Finsec union struck Westpac banks across New Zealand on December 23. Hundreds of strikers joined noisy rallies here and in Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Rotorua, Gisborne, and Hawkes Bay to back the union's demand for a decent pay increase and an end to a hated regime of sales targets.

Westpac is one of the largest banks in New Zealand. While most branches stayed open with nonunion and management labor, the company was forced to close up to 30 outlets.

Sixty workers picketed the main branch in Christchurch. Workers said they rejected a company offer of a 5.2 percent wage raise over 18 months. Finsec members said they hate the way Westpac pressures them to foist new debt onto customers. In a typical case, customer service workers—who have a sales target of 8,575 points a year—gain 10 points for opening a new account but more than double that for persuading a customer to take up a new credit card. "The sales targets are not reachable," Finsec president Sue Boraston told the Christchurch pickets. "The targets get higher every year and if you don't make these targets you lose your job—and people *do* lose their jobs."

"They keep on stretching the targets—we don't have any control over them," Pushpa Iyer told the *Militant* at the Auckland march and rally of 200 workers. Ryan Stanley, another Finsec member, added, "To get to the top grade you have to be Superman."

Making their way through Auckland's busy city center and stopping outside each Westpac branch, workers chanted, "Service, not targets!" They carried placards reading, "Overworked, underpaid," and "Would you like fries with that?"—a reference to the constant pressure to push new debt onto customers.

To conclude the protest, union members spread out across the street opposite the bank's head office and sang a union version of the traditional song, "Twelve Days of Christmas," while Finsec representatives delivered a Christmas parcel of rolled-up placards to the office.

Callum Williamson is a member of Finsec and works at Westpac. Patrick Brown contributed to this article from Auckland.

Socialists: fights by meat packers open space to strengthen union

BY TOM FISKE AND HILDA CUZCO

LOS ANGELES—"There are an increased number of significant workers' struggles in the meatpacking industry," said Rebecca Williamson. "This means there is lots of space for workers—among them workers who are socialists—to join with others to build the union and beat back the bosses' attacks." A boning knife worker at Dakota Premium Foods, in St. Paul, Minnesota, and member of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 789, Williamson was addressing a meeting of members of the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialists who belong to the UFCW or work in the red meat industry. The gathering was held here December 17–18.

Those present related their experiences from across North America. One of the strongest of these fights was the 23-day strike at the Tyson-owned Lakeside Packers plant in Brooks, Alberta—the largest beef slaughterhouse in Canada, with 2,100 employees. These workers succeeded against many obstacles, including company violence, in crippling production and winning their first union contract since the 1980s.

John Hawkins, a member of UFCW Local 400 in the Washington-Baltimore area, described how he and another socialist worker joined a union contingent to gain publicity and solidarity for the Lakeside strike at the October 15 Millions More Movement rally in Washington, D.C. "This contingent was an important initiative of the union," Hawkins said. "Getting solidarity for the Lakeside packers fight wasalso of organizing our co-workers into the union where we work too."

Edwin Fruit, a meat packer in Des Moines, Iowa, said he went to Brooks, Alberta, to bring solidarity from his plant to the unionists on strike at the Lakeside plant. "When I came back, the president of my union local asked me to give a report at a union meeting where the local decided to send a letter of congratulations to the workers in Brooks," he said. The letter was translated into Arabic and Spanish and was circulated throughout the plant by union stewards, who got many workers to sign.

An important fight has been unfolding at a huge poultry plant, Foster Farms, in Livingston, California. "Foster Farms workers are fighting for union recognition and better working conditions," explained Gerardo Sánchez, a meat packer from San Francisco. "There are 2,000 workers there and they have just organized their third walkout. The *Militant* is greatly appreciated since it has a reputation for telling the truth about their fight."

Mobilizing union power to back struggles by workers in other industries is also part of strengthening the union, several participants pointed out. "One of the centers of the mechanics' strike against Northwest Airlines is the Twin Cities," said Tom Fiske, a meat packer in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. "Local 789 of the UFCW has given important aid in this fight. At their last meeting, union members heard strike leaders describe their fight and voted to make a $3,000 contribution to the strike. In addition, one of the longtime leaders of the fight at Dakota Premium Foods, Miguel Olvera, gave a talk at one of the mechanics' rallies that had a big impact on the strikers. Socialist workers at Dakota Premium participated with others in helping these solidarity actions."

Socialist workers also resolved to build on initial successes in winning support within the UFCW and the broader labor movement for defending the *Militant* against a harassment lawsuit by the owners of the Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah. UFCW locals 120 and 428 in California, the UFCW Minority Coalition, and Gregory Hamblet and Wendell Young III—both international vice presidents of the union—are among the hundreds of endorsers of the Militant Fighting Fund, which was initiated to help the *Mililtant* defend itself.

N.Y. transit workers stood up to boss attacks

Continued from front page

$1,000 each. Transport Workers Union Local 100 has already been hit for $3 million. The courts have scheduled further hearings on collecting these fines.

The transit workers shut down the Metropolitan Transit Authority's (MTA) operations December 20—five days after the contract's expiration—following repeated refusals by the bosses to budge on demands for a two-tier retirement plan under which new hires would pay 6 percent of wages toward their pension.

"Going on strike was worth it because we maintained our equal status—active workers and new workers," Daniel Bozan, a bus mechanic in the Bronx with five years on the job, told the *Militant*. The MTA demand for a two-tier plan "would have caused a division in the membership, and eventually the 'new hires' with worse benefits would become the majority," he said.

On December 27 the union executive board and the MTA announced a settlement that the ranks will vote on by mail over the coming weeks. The MTA withdrew its pension demands. But the union negotiators conceded the introduction of a 1.5 percent deduction from workers' paychecks slated to go toward their health plan.

"If we start paying even 1 percent for medical care, it will be more down the road," Donald Tough, who works at the northern Manhattan subway maintenance base, said while leaving work January 3. "And not just for us, but for all municipal workers." The tentative contract states, "In future years, the 1.5% contribution rate shall be increased by the extent to which the rate of increase in the cost of health benefits exceeds general wage increases."

Vidal Acevedo, a bus operator at the Jackie Gleason depot in Brooklyn, thought the original contract offer was better because the concessions didn't affect current employees. "The new people haven't been hired yet," he said. "They have 30 years to fight to get the pension back."

The 37-month deal includes annual wage raises of 3 percent, 4 percent, and 3.5 percent. Retirees too young to qualify for Medicare or who live outside the New York metropolitan area would receive the same medical coverage as active workers under the agreement. Local 100's list of contract highlights says workers will receive "maternity pay for the first time ever" as well as the holiday for Martin Luther King's birthday in January.

The contract offer provides refunds to as many as 20,000 Local 100 members for overpayments into the pension plan between 1994 and 2001. According to news reports, a "side agreement" to the contract commits the MTA to cover the costs of this refund if Governor George Pataki vetoes the legislation that is needed to pay for the refunds.

"I never had any briefing or knowledge that there was a side agreement," Pataki said January 1. "I made it plain from the beginning: You don't reward illegal strikes."

The big-business media has tried to convince working people that standing up for their rights will gain them

Continued on page 9

Minnesota unionists back labor defense case

C.W. Mining, owner of the Co-Op coal mine in Huntington, Utah, continues to press its harassment lawsuit targeting 16 miners, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and others who have supported the fight for a union at Co-Op. A new hearing on the case is scheduled in Salt Lake City on January 25. The Militant Fighting Fund is helping to defend the Militant*, which is charged with defamation in the coal boss suit because of its news articles and editorial support for the miners. Endorsements and contributions are much needed and can be sent to: Militant Fighting Fund, P.O. Box 520994, Salt Lake City, UT 84152. Materials on the case are posted at www.themilitant.com.*

BY TOM FISKE

ST. PAUL, Minnesota—Supporters of the *Militant* and the UMWA fight to unionize the Co-Op mine from this area have been able to win new endorsers for the Militant Fighting Fund among mechanics on strike against Northwest Airlines and their supporters. Mike Klemm, the national strike captain and a member of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) Local 33 here, has signed on. Karen Schultz, the communications coordinator of the Professional Flight Attendants Association who has spoken in solidarity with the AMFA strike at solidarity rallies here, is now also an endorser and has contributed to the fund.

Two supporters of the Militant Fighting Fund in the Twin Cities also attended a Human Rights Day event in Rochester, Minnesota, in December, sponsored by the Southeast Minnesota Central Labor Council. After giving some information on the case to organizers of the event, a supporter of the *Militant* was invited to speak about the case to the 25 people present. After the presentation, Russell Hess, president of the Labor Council, and Wesley Urevig, president of Southeast Minnesota Building and Trades, endorsed the case.

Northwest Airlines mechanics vote to remain on strike

ST. PAUL, Minnesota—Mechanics and cleaners on strike since August 19 against Northwest Airlines rejected an offer December 30 to end the walkout. The unionists, members of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA), voted 1,258 to 965 against a contract that offered the strikers no jobs and would just reclassify them as laid off. Had strikers approved Northwest's proposal they would have received four weeks' severance pay and compensation for vacation time already accrued. In addition, Northwest promised not to challenge unemployment claims of strikers who had not taken other jobs. "I didn't go on strike for a contract like this," mechanic Mike Bauer told the *Grand Forks Herald.*

The company filed for bankruptcy in September and is seeking an additional $1.4 billion in pay and job cuts from the pilots, flight attendants, and ramp and baggage workers.

—Nelson Gonzalez

Poultry workers in California reaffirm fight for union rights

LIVINGSTON, California—Hundreds of Foster Farm poultry workers, their families, and supporters gathered December 18 for a holiday potluck dinner and union meeting. Members of the League of Independent Workers of the San Joaquin Valley, affiliated with the International Association of Machinists (IAM), continue their fight for union recognition and a decent contract.

At the potluck, Micaela Alvarado and Elivier Dealvaez, both coordinators for the union in the plant, explained the justice of their cause. They both showed repetitive motion injuries to their arms that resulted from the bosses' speed-up of production. The workers are demanding a slower line speed to cut down on such injuries. The huge chicken plant processes 500,000 chickens a day.

The company has tried to intimidate workers by threatening to fire those who participated in three walkouts last month. No one has been fired, but 29 were demoted from their lead positions.

At a rally and picket line December 10 commemorating International Human Rights Day, Jim Beno, directing business agent of IAM District 190, pointed to the importance of the battle by workers at Foster Farms for the entire labor movement. It was held at a Dodge car dealership in Concord, California, where 22 workers are on strike to stop company cuts in medical and other benefits.

—Lea Sherman

Stanford University workers strike for a day in contract fight

STANFORD, California—Members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 715 struck Stanford University and its two hospitals on December 12. The hospital workers, who include nursing assistants, operating room assistants, food service workers, housekeepers, lab assistants, and others, have been working without a contract since November 13. Stanford wants to shift more health coverage costs to the workers, outsource union jobs, and transfer union workers to non-union sites. The university also wants to shift employees' pensions from a secure defined benefit plan to speculating on the stock market.

"Hospital workers were forced to take this action because Stanford refuses to bargain fairly for health care for our families, industry-standard wages, and secure jobs," said Jesus Andrade, a hospital who is chair of the bargaining team. The union also wants to have some say in staffing levels, José Pérez pointed out. A lively rally and picket line drew support from others. Julio Solis, who worked 30 years in farm labor cutting lettuce and other crops, said, "I've never seen so much suffering among working people. The situation is getting worse."

—Robert Dees

Gas engineers in UK suspend strikes to consider new offer

UDDINGSTON, Scotland—After a one-day strike December 12 by some 6,000 engineers employed by British Gas, members of the General, Municipal, and Boilermakers union have suspended further planned strike action to discuss a new company offer. Centrica, the parent company, has been seeking to close the final salary pension scheme to new entrants from the end of 2005. The new offer keeps open the final pension scheme for a further three months for 1,700 recent hires to join if they wish and £35 million (£1=US$1.73) extra funding for the pension fund.

—Pamela Holmes

Greece: public sector workers strike against new antilabor law

ATHENS, Greece—Thousands of public sector workers struck December 14–15 against a government draft law approved at a parliamentary session December 14. More than 5,000 union members rallied in downtown Athens the day of the vote. The new law denies newly hired public employees the right of permanent employment, which public sector workers have had until now. It also empowers government authorities to impose contract settlements in case of deadlock between the unions and the responsible state authority. Workers in public transportation, the state-owned oil refineries, electric company, phone company, state-owned banks, public education teachers, and civil servants joined the two-day strike.

—Georges Mehrabian

California: laundry workers walk out over wages, pensions

BY NAOMI CRAINE

COLTON, California—More than 300 members of UNITE HERE went on strike at the Angelica laundry here December 18. "We want better benefits and a just wage," said Regina Díaz, who has worked at Angelica for 27 years. The work is heavy and the bosses yell "*Rápido, rápido*," (fast, fast) she added. Like most workers in the plant, Díaz earns less than $8 per hour and has no pension. According to the union, wages at this plant are about $1 less than the industry average. The contract here expired October 31.



Militant/Naomi Craine

Members of UNITE HERE at Angelica industrial laundry in Colton, California, picket plant December 22 after they walked off the job.

On New Year's Day, the strikers warmly greeted a solidarity visit from workers employed by another Angelica laundry plant in Los Angeles. Strikers here have also sent delegations to other Angelica plants, including in San Diego and Pomona, where many workers learned about the strike for the first time.

Angelica has 32 plants nationally, many of them in California, providing linen service to hospitals and other health-care facilities. About two-thirds of the company's plants are organized by UNITE HERE. Workers at several other Angelica plants carried out one-day walkouts in contract fights last May. Workers in some of the company's other laundries are seeking to unionize.

Lou Pacheco, a member of the union's Justice Committee, scoffed at the statement reported in the press by plant manager Roscoe Morrissette that Angelica had offered a good pension plan and a 5.4 percent wage increase. Pacheco said the bosses' initial offer was for wage raises of 10–15 cents per hour each year, which workers consider an insult. A fact sheet issued by the union reported the company's "final offer" was for hourly wage increases of 40 cents the first year and 25 cents the second and third years, with no pension. Starting wages are $7 per hour.

Only a handful of union members have crossed the picket line, strikers report. The company is maintaining some production with temporary workers. Dozens of strikers are staffing picket lines around the clock. They said some temp workers who showed up were convinced not to cross. "The boss says this is a good place for your future," said Augustín Cervantes, who has worked just three months at the laundry. "I'm making $7 an hour. What kind of future is that?"

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO

THE MILITANT
25 CENTS
A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY/PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

January 16, 1981

The Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance have initiated a nationwide campaign to win back the jobs of nine of their members fired last month by Lockheed aircraft in Marietta, Georgia. Lockheed insists that the nine were terminated because of "falsifications" on their job applications.

But sworn testimony of Lockheed security cop Robert Lang, and internal company documents obtained by the SWP and YSA, show conclusively that the socialists were singled out for their political ideas and activities.

This evidence also shows that the FBI aided Lockheed in fingering the workers to be fired. Misstatements in their job applications were simply the pretext.

Lang's testimony revealed that Lockheed maintains a network of informers inside the plant whose activities include spying on union meetings. Lang followed workers he suspected of being socialists to their homes, to restaurants, stores, and laundries, and to political events. He reported at length on their participation in an anti-Klan demonstration.

THE MILITANT
PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE
NEW YORK, N.Y. FIVE (5) CENTS

January 16, 1956

The attempt to rob James Kutcher of the disability pension that was his due when he lost both legs in the Second World War has been defeated. The Veterans Administration, after its "I-make-the-rules" hearing, decided that it didn't have enough grounds for picking the pocket of the Socialist veteran.

The fight for justice that Kutcher has waged for nearly eight years scored a victory. But Kutcher's civil liberties will not be restored until he gets his job back.

In addition to Kutcher's means of subsistence—an absolute minimum that had to be won—what gains have been made in this fight against the witch hunt? In 1955 the government, for the first time, began to invade the impartial and non-political administration of social security legislation.

The attempt of the VA to take Kutcher's pension away was part of a political decision by the witch hunters to tighten the economic squeeze on political dissidents even to the extent of depriving them of what was legally and specifically theirs.

THE MILITANT
Weekly Organ of the Communist League of America [Opposition]

January 1, 1931

After two months of heroic struggle, the strike of the 4,000 textile workers of Danville and Schoolfield, Va., is continuing militantly in spite of the "pacific" policy of the United Textile Workers.

At the present the strike of the Virginia workers is the only major industrial conflict taking place in the United States and what it will lead to is of paramount importance to all workers, especially insofar as the future of the National Textile Workers Union is concerned.

A little over a year ago, the N.T.W.U. led the historic strike in Gastonia which we were told was the beginning of a series of mighty struggles south of the Mason-Dixie line. At that time, the U.T.W. had a base only at Elizabethton, Tenn. and Marion, N.C. Today, it has support in many textile centers of the South while the N.T.W.U. is all but liquidated everywhere, including Gastonia. The Danville workers are feeling the heavy club of the capitalist class just as their comrades did in Gastonia in 1929.

‘My trench in fighting imperialism: independence struggle’

Interview with Puerto Rican independence fighter Antonio Camacho Negrón

The following is an interview with Antonio Camacho Negrón, a longtime leader of the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial rule. One of the Puerto Rican independence fighters convicted on frame-up charges in connection with a 1983 robbery from a Wells Fargo depot in Hartford, Connecticut, Camacho was locked up in U.S. prisons for 15 years and was released in August 2004. Martín Koppel and Róger Calero conducted the interview December 12 in New York City.



Militant/Paul Pederson

Antonio Camacho Negrón, who spent 15 years in U.S. jails for supporting fight for Puerto Rico’s independence, speaks November 18 at New York event to honor life of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, a leader of Puerto Rican group Los Macheteros the FBI killed in September.

Question: Could you tell us about the fight for the release of all the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners, both the longtime independentista *prisoners and those jailed for taking part in the successful struggle to get the U.S. Navy out of the island of Vieques?*

Answer: There is an ongoing campaign, both in Puerto Rico and the United States, for the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners. Three have been locked up in U.S. prisons for more than 20 years because of their actions for the freedom of Puerto Rico: Oscar López, Carlos Alberto Torres, and Haydée Beltrán.

They are serving long sentences. Oscar López, for example, would not be released until 2027, so it will take a political campaign to force the U.S. authorities to free him and the others.

Of the *compañeros* who were jailed for actions demanding the U.S. Navy get out of Vieques, two remain in federal prison. We will celebrate the release of José Vélez Acosta on January 27. José Pérez González is serving a sentence until January 2008, and we demand he be released immediately.

Q. The FBI killing of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, leader of the Macheteros pro-independence organization, on September 23, sparked protests and outrage among many Puerto Ricans. Could you comment on this?

A. When the U.S. government assassinated compañero Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, they made a big mistake. They always underestimate the national sentiment and the moral fiber of our people. They underestimated the capacity of the Puerto Rican people to react in face of such a vile murder. They are blinded, by their arrogance and class mentality, to the social demands and aspirations of freedom of oppressed peoples. So they are surprised when our people turn out in defense of one of their sons, recognizing Filiberto Ojeda Ríos as a national hero.

U.S. imperialism has dominated Puerto Rico politically and economically for more than a century. They try to make us believe they are giving us something, that they are sustaining us. But the opposite is true—they are exploiting us in every sense of the word. Puerto Rico’s labor is plundered. Unemployment is officially 16–17 percent, but real unemployment is about 40 percent.

The imperialists have tried to destroy our national identity as a people. They have tried to force us to speak English. They have tried to deny us access to the history of our great men and women and the major events in our struggle for national liberation. They have tried to destroy our values of unity, fraternity, and humanism, and instead foster the mentality of the market and capitalist exploitation.

This has led to a new generation of rebel youth who react against this, who refuse to have their Puerto Rican identity uprooted.

Q. How do you see Puerto Rico in the world today?

A. I view the struggle for independence in the context of the worldwide fight against imperialism. I fight for the independence of Puerto Rico because it’s my trench in this struggle. But I would fight in any other country for the social demands and the liberation of that people from imperialism.

The Puerto Rican independence struggle has been tied from the beginning to the Cuban struggle for liberation. The Grito de Yara in Cuba took place right after the Grito de Lares in Puerto Rico—these were the two pro-independence revolts against Spain in 1868. Today we see the continuation of the Cuban people’s support to the independence of the Puerto Rican people. We recognize the Cuban government’s cooperation, aid, and commitment to our struggle.

Q. Tell us about your own experience in the struggle for Puerto Rico’s independence.

A. I was born on Oct. 15, 1945, on my family’s coffee farm in the mountains near the town of Yauco, Puerto Rico. As a youth I began to notice the dichotomy of having two flags and two national anthems. I saw U.S. military police persecuting neighbors who refused to join the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

These are some of the experiences that led me from an early age, although my parents were not *independentistas*, to question something that was abnormal. I began to explore Puerto Rico’s situation through reading, and had the opportunity to meet leaders of the independence movement such as Juan Antonio Corretjer. In 1965, when I was 19, I attended the funeral for [Nationalist Party leader] Pedro Albizu Campos.

At the time I was in seventh or eighth grade, at the end of the 1950s, people did not talk about independence or freedom. The mentality of many Puerto Ricans was affected by what was called “the little Smith Act,” the Gag Law [modeled on the thought-control Smith Act in the United States] that had been used to repress the independence movement in the 1950s. As I and other students gained awareness of the political situation, I began to speak openly about these questions in the classroom, in the school. The teachers would try to keep me from talking about these things.

Little by little, study circles began to be organized in my school. They were disguised as cooperatives, sometimes with the names of patriots who were also known as poets or writers. Through those circles we began to discuss and organize around the question of independence for Puerto Rico. Later at my school these groups became part of the youth organization of the Puerto Rican Socialist League (LSP), led by Juan Antonio Corretjer. That was in 1960–61.

After I graduated in 1965, for financial reasons I went to New York, where I worked various jobs in factories. While there I was drafted into the U.S. Army. I was in the army for two years, from 1966 to 1968, stationed in Germany.

After getting out of the army I entered the University of Puerto Rico. I became involved in the student struggles, which were very intense. Later I graduated and entered law school, but after a few years I realized the career of a lawyer was not for me. I didn’t want to become a prop for this system.

Q. Tell us a little more about your arrest and imprisonment.

A. The FBI carried out a massive raid in Puerto Rico on Aug. 30, 1985. There were more arrests in March 1987, when I was detained. Nineteen people were charged in connection with the $7.2 million robbery from a Wells Fargo depot in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1983, by the Macheteros. Two were acquitted and the rest were convicted. This was part of the U.S. government’s war against the Puerto Rican independence struggle.

I was convicted in 1989 and jailed for 15 years in different U.S. prisons, mostly at the federal prison in Allenwood, Pennsylvania. I was not able to see my children for nine years.

A major international defense campaign was waged. It created a popular ferment, demanding the release of the political prisoners, that had not been seen in Puerto Rico in decades. Hundreds of thousands signed appeals for the release of the political prisoners. There were marches of more than 100,000 in Puerto Rico, as well as protests in New York, Chicago, and other U.S. cities. All this contributed to the release of 11 political prisoners in 1999.

The 11 compañeros were freed on parole under extremely onerous conditions. I did not accept the conditions that the U.S. government demanded, so I remained in prison. I had been sentenced to 15 years and had the right to parole after serving a third of the sentence, but I didn’t appear before the parole board. So I was first released in 1997, after serving nine years. I refused to report to the federal authorities because I didn’t recognize their authority in Puerto Rico, so within a month they locked me up again.

In 1999 I rejected the conditions the U.S. government demanded for releasing us. First, they demanded that we accept guilt. I don’t have to acknowledge guilt for fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico. Second, they demanded periodic drug testing. Third, they demanded I report any visits to my home and all my movements.

Fourth, I would be barred from speaking to any person with a federal conviction. In other words, I couldn’t greet Rafael Cancel Miranda, Lolita Lebrón, or other *independentistas* who had been freed, including my own brother Isaac Camacho, who was released in 1995.

I was released again in 2001, and spent 11 months out of prison. Without reporting to the authorities, of course, and taking part in political activities in Puerto Rico. So they locked me up again and I served out the remaining two years, and was released on Aug. 21, 2004.

The U.S. government still claims I owe them 76 days in prison. Federal marshals in Puerto Rico have told my attorney, Linda Backiel, that they have an arrest warrant against me. We’ve shown that their calculations are incorrect and that I completed the sentence. They still say I must report to federal authorities in Puerto Rico but I never have.

Q. Can you describe your current activity?

A. Right now I’ve been devoted to the building of a new organization, the National Congress for the Decolonization of Puerto Rico, CONADE. It’s an umbrella organization whose goal is to unite all Puerto Ricans who genuinely believe in the decolonization of Puerto Rico, regardless of their current political affiliation. This effort has been well received among diverse sectors in Puerto Rico. We will hold the First Congress for the Decolonization of Puerto Rico on March 28–30, 2006.

Africa: Cuba's role decisive in national liberation struggles

Fidel Castro speaks on 30th anniversary of Cuban fighters' arrival in Angola

We reprint below the third and last excerpt of a speech given by Cuban president Fidel Castro at a meeting held in Havana on Dec. 2, 2005, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Cuba's internationalist mission in Angola.

This is part of a series of articles and documents the *Militant* is publishing to mark the 30th anniversary of Cuba's internationalist response to Angola's request for help in defeating the invading armed forces of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Between 1975, when Angola won independence from Portugal, and 1991, some 300,000 Cuban volunteers fought alongside Angolan soldiers to beat back assaults by the apartheid forces. This led to the defeat of the South African army in the 1987–88 battle of Cuito Cuanavale and contributed to the demise of the apartheid regime and the independence of Namibia, a South African colony. Cuba's combat mission in Angola was named Operation Carlota, after the woman who led an 1843 slave revolt in Cuba.

The English translation of the speech is available at www.granma.cubaweb.cu, the web site of the Cuban daily *Granma*. Subtitles, material in brackets, and minor translation and stylistic changes are by the *Militant*.



BY FIDEL CASTRO

A great deal could be said about all the engagements and incidents in that campaign [at Cuito Cuanavale]. Here with us are Comrade Polo Cinta Frías, the bold commander of the Angola southern front at that time, and many comrades who took part in the actions of those glorious, unforgettable days.

The resounding victories in Cuito Cuanavale, especially the devastating advance by the powerful Cuban contingent in southwest Angola, spelled the end of foreign aggression.

The enemy had to set aside its usual arrogance and sit down at the negotiating table. The talks culminated in the Peace Accords for Southern Africa, signed by South Africa, Angola, and Cuba at the UN headquarters in December 1988.

The accords were designated as quadripartite, since the Angolans and the Cubans sat on one side of the table with the South Africans opposite; the United States occupied a third side, given its role as mediator. In reality, America was judge and party, an ally of the apartheid regime. Its rightful place was alongside the South Africans.

The head of the U.S. delegation, undersecretary Chester Crocker, for years opposed Cuba's participation. But given the seriousness of the military situation for the South African aggressors, he had no choice but to accept our presence….

This Reagan administration spokesman was well aware that with Cuba at the negotiating table, dirty tricks, blackmail, intimidation and lies would not succeed.

There would be no repeat of what happened in Paris in 1898, when the Americans and the Spanish held peace talks without Cuban representation, the Liberation Army and the government of Cuba in arms….

The internationalist mission was fully accomplished. Our troops came back to the homeland with heads held high, taking with them only the friendship of the Angolan people, the weapons they had wielded with honor and bravery thousands of miles away from their homeland, the satisfaction of duty done and the glorious mortal remains of our fallen brothers and sisters.

Their contribution was decisive in consolidating Angola's independence and achieving that of Namibia. It was also a significant contribution to the liberation of Zimbabwe and the demise of South Africa's repugnant apartheid regime.

Rarely in history has war, the most terrible, heartrending, and difficult of human actions, been accompanied by such humanism and humility on the part of the victors, despite the near-total absence of these values in the ranks of the vanquished. Firmness of principle and purity of aims explain the complete transparency of every campaign undertaken by our internationalist fighters.

Beyond doubt, a decisive ingredient is the tradition established by our freedom combatants in the epic struggles for independence, reinforced by rebels and fifth-column fighters during the War of National Liberation and carried on by the militia, by members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior since the Revolution, against enemies abroad and at home.

Full story has not yet been told

That heroic saga has never been told in full. On its 30th anniversary, American imperialism went out of its way to prevent any mention of Cuba even at the commemorative ceremonies. To cap it all, it tried to rewrite history: Cuba, it seems, never played any part at all in Angolan independence, Namibian independence or the defeat of the until-then invincible army of apartheid. In fact, Cuba doesn't even exist; it's a figment of people's imagination. It is as if the U.S. government had absolutely nothing to do with the hundreds of thousands of Angolan dead, the thousands of villages razed to the ground, the millions of land mines planted in Angolan territory, where they still take the lives of many children, women and other civilians….

Now, U.S. imperialism is extracting billions of dollars from Angola, plundering its natural resources and draining its oil and other non-renewable resources. Cuba has been true to the word of the famous anticolonial leader Amilcar Cabral [of Guinea-Bissau]: "Cuban fighters are ready to lay down their lives for the liberation of our countries, and in exchange for this aid to our freedom and the progress of our people, all they take from us are their comrades who fell fighting for freedom."



Granma

Cuban troops in southern Angola during "Operation Carlota" against apartheid forces

The absurd attempt by the Americans to ignore the honorable role played by Cuba offends the African peoples. It is partly due to the fact that the full history of these events has not been recorded.

Prestigious researchers make great efforts in seeking information. Cuba, for its part, has never wanted to write it and avoids talking about what it did with such selflessness and spirit of solidarity. We are ready, however, to lend our modest aid, progressively releasing the relevant files and documents, to serious, reputable writers interested in giving a true account of those events.

The Angola achievement and the struggle for Namibia's independence against the fascist apartheid regime are a source of much strength to our people. The countless acts of heroism, self-sacrifice and humanism performed by over 300,000 internationalist fighters and some 50,000 Cuban civilian collaborators, who on a totally voluntary basis participated in missions to Angola, are a treasure of immense value.

This noble tradition is now being carried on by tens of thousands of doctors and other professionals, as well as health workers, teachers, sports coaches and other specialists who express their solidarity often by working in difficult, including war zone, conditions, as in the case of the celebrated Henry Reeve Contingent.

The name of that operation is both symbolic of and homage to the thousands of slaves who perished in combat or were executed during the early uprisings.

Those brought to the fore women such as Carlota, a Lucumi African from the slaves at the Triunvirato refinery in Matanzas, who in 1843 led one of the many uprisings against the terrible stigma of slavery, losing her life in the attempt.

Independence fighters, rebels, clandestine fighters, combatants in Playa Girón [in 1961, at the Bay of Pigs], the October [1962 Missile] crisis and the campaign against bandits and internationalists, militiamen, members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior, all in all, the combative people, are the fruit of the productive tree that grew in this land from African and Spanish roots….

We will always resist imperialism

Once again, we reaffirm an eternal commitment to our glorious dead, to carry forward the revolution and to be always worthy of their example; to the Cubans, past and present, ready to fight and die with honor in defense of justice; and to the men and women who, like Máximo Gómez, Henry Reeve, and Che Guevara, have done so much to show us, here in our homeland and throughout history, the immense value of solidarity.

Present and future generations of Cubans will continue to advance however difficult the road ahead, fighting restlessly to defend the Revolution, keeping it as impregnable politically as it is militarily and as it soon will be economically.

We shall redouble our efforts to remedy our shortcomings and correct our mistakes. The fight will go on. We shall always resist.

We shall continue to defeat every act of imperialist aggression, refute the lies of its propaganda and expose its political and diplomatic chicanery.

We shall continue to withstand the effects of the embargo, which will be defeated one day by the dignity of the Cuban people, the solidarity among the peoples, the near total opposition of the international community—as was demonstrated yet again by the voting at the United Nations—and by growing opposition on the part of the American public to an absurd policy that flagrantly violates their constitutional rights.

Just as the imperialists and their lackeys suffered in Angola the consequences of a Girón multiplied several times over, those who land here to wage war will face thousands of Quifangondos, Cabindas, Ebos, Meduna Morros, Cangambas, Ruacanas, Tchipas, Calueques and Cuito Cuanavales.

Our internationalists, like the rest of the Cuban fighters, which means the entire Cuban people, know that in the event of military aggression, we shall defeat the invader. And you, veterans of our homeland's history, will be among the heroes of that victory!

How imperialist powers used UN to crush Congo's liberation

Below is an excerpt from Revolution in the Congo, *one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for January. Originally published as a Young Socialist pamphlet, it describes the anticolonial struggle in the Congo, which won formal independence from Belgian colonial rule in 1960, and the role of anti-imperialist leader Patrice Lumumba in the Congolese freedom struggle. The pamphlet explains how—under United Nations cover—U.S. and Belgian imperialism intervened in the Congo, orchestrating the overthrow and assassination of Lumumba to install a pro-imperialist regime. Copyright © 1965 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.*

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY DICK ROBERTS

The Congo has been the scene of unceasing turbulence since June 30th, 1960, the day the Congolese gained formal independence from Belgium. Real independence, however, consisting of self-determination in all spheres of life, could not be obtained simply through a change in the political relationships between the Congo and Belgium. This change only set the state for a new and deeper struggle, the struggle for *economic* independence.

Not only Belgium, but France, England, and particularly the United States had no intention of allowing their vast economic holdings in the Congo to be jeopardized by the new Republic. Increasingly, as the Congolese struggle became one for economic independence, these foreign powers and their agents within the Congo became formidable opponents of independence. The deepening struggle drove divisions into the Congolese peoples, widely separating those who fought for complete independence from those who desired to remain within the economic confines of world capitalist investment….

Upon achieving political independence, the Congolese held a general election to determine the membership of their democratic parliament. The majority of their seats were won by the largest independence force, the Congolese National Movement, headed by the revered leader of the independence struggle, Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba was named Prime Minister….

The Belgians had forced the Congolese to allow them to maintain an army and air bases in the Congo, ostensibly for "mutual cooperation." A week after independence, when Congolese soldiers demonstrated against their Belgian officers with a demand for pay and rank raises, Belgian troops fired on the demonstrators. Lumumba, in turn, removed the Belgian officers and appointed Josef Kasavubu commander-in-chief.

The Belgians quickly exploited the situation they had provoked. Claiming that Lumumba was inspiring "racial hatred" and couldn't be trusted to govern the Congo, they rushed in new troops, and separated Katanga from the Congo Republic—using Moise Tshombe, a wealthy plantation owner and businessman as their Katanga front-man.



Above: United Nations

Patrice Lumumba (above), prime minister of Republic of Congo, speaking at United Nations, July 25, 1960. Imperialist powers used mercenaries (right) and troops under UN flag to topple and assassinate Lumumba.

In this crisis, Lumumba correctly accused the Belgians of having "carefully prepared the secession of Katanga," and asked for the immediate help of the United Nations…a fatal error, as Lumumba himself learned, all too soon. The United States completely dominated the UN.

Seizing the opportunity to extend foreign military control in the Congo, the U.S. pushed the UN to meet Lumumba's request, and the UN sped troops to the Congo July 14. They had no intentions of driving Belgium out of the Congo….

It was almost immediately apparent to Lumumba that the UN was double dealing, and he requested outside support from the Soviet Union, to intervene "should the Western camp not stop its aggression."

By July 30 the Belgians had built up a force of over 10,000 troops, and the UN army had refused to enter Katanga….

In Katanga, Belgian troops crushed uprisings of Congolese soldiers and miners, and protected Tshombe's efforts to suppress opposition from minority leaders in the Katanga parliament. The UN closed broadcasting stations in Leopoldville and commanded Lumumba not to meddle in Katanga. Unfortunately, Lumumba continued to rely on appeals to the UN, undoubtedly supported in this futile effort by the Soviet Union.

On September 5, Lumumba was summarily removed from office, Soviet representatives were ordered out of the country, and a military dictatorship was established under Col. Mobutu….

Again Lumumba temporized, this time fatally. Remaining in Leopoldville until the end of November, his belated effort to escape was doomed to fail. On December 1st, Lumumba was seized, publicly mauled in a truck before U.S. TV cameras and imprisoned in Leopoldville; this while UN forces stood by.

On January 18, Kasavubu, in return for a "round-table conference" with Tshombe, handed prisoner Lumumba over to the Belgian stooge….

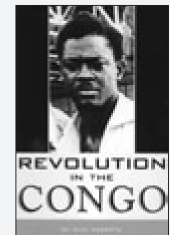
And, as it became clear upon UN investigation months later, Lumumba and his two aides were subsequently murdered. Their deaths were reported by Tshombe, February 12.



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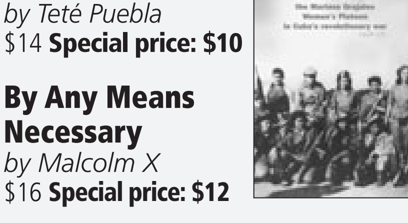
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EDITORIAL

Safety v. profits in the mines

Bosses and government officials alike would like to hide what's really behind the deaths of 12 workers at the Sago Mine in West Virginia. What killed these miners was the ravenous drive for profits and the antiunion offensive by the coal bosses, in this case the International Coal Group (ICG). This is what capitalism promises working people in the New Year and years to come.

Despite all the bogus "work safe" policies the profit-makers use to blame workers for job injuries and fatalities, our lives and limbs are the last thing bosses are concerned about. Workers who have sat through a company "safety talk" know this.

Mine fatalities are not due to "accidents." Dangerous conditions are created by cold-blooded employer decisions to maximize productivity and profits. The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) had cited the Sago mine for 273 safety violations in two years; in the last eight months, 16 of these had been deemed "unwarrantable failures," meaning serious safety infractions the company was warned about fixing but flat out ignored. Similar conditions exist in mines across the United States. Coal companies routinely take the fines, cover up the violations with cosmetic measures, and get back to mining coal.

Mine roofs can be secured. Gunpowder-like coal dust and explosive gases can be neutralized. Worn and exposed electrical wires can be replaced. But such life-saving measures—the lack of which is a major factor in this and other mine explosions—takes time away from the coal bosses' production and costs money. So they do as little of it as possible. Then they try to pressure workers into accepting a false tradeoff—jobs or safety—to let the company slide on safe conditions. Whether a mine, a meatpacking plant, or a subway track, the questions are the same.

Meanwhile, ICG coal barons brag to their investors about their "union-free" mines in the East. This underscores the heart of the matter: the need for *unions* to fight for workers' interests. All improvements in safety conditions and protective legislation over the years have been due to one thing alone—workers organizing unions and using them. Today, for example, the fight against hazardous conditions is at the center of the battle by workers in Huntington, Utah, to win recognition for the United Mine Workers of America at the Co-Op coal mine.

Despite all the vaunted MSHA citations at Sago, government officials refused to do what was needed to protect workers—shut down the mine and force compliance with basic safety norms. This is because the government is not a "neutral" body. It is designed to serve the interests of a tiny class of billionaire families that rules the country through its ownership of the mines, factories, banks, and real estate. The employers have two main parties, the Democrats and Republicans; workers have none.

To confront the increasingly brutal conditions the bosses have in store for our class, at home and abroad, we need to organize a party of our own—a labor party based on the trade unions, a political organization that will fight for the interests of all working people.

Wealthy Sunnis lead protests in Iraq

Continued from front page

merga militia. The Sunni-led protests open a period of jockeying for seats in the parliament and posts in the new government that will likely take months to form.

In five speeches in December U.S. president George Bush pointed to the large turnout among Sunnis in the Iraqi elections as progress for Washington in its aim to establish a regime favorable to the interests of finance capital in the region.

The U.S. government got another boost for its course in Iraq when the Polish government announced it would extend the deployment of its troops there to the end of 2006, reversing an earlier decision to withdraw them soon.

Hundreds of thousands demonstrated December 23 in southern Baghdad, said the Associated Press. Some carried pictures of Iyad Allawi, a former prime minister in the U.S.-backed Interim Government of Iraq. Allawi, a wealthy Shiite and former leader of the Baath party that ruled until the 2003 U.S. invasion, led the Iraqi National List, which included Shiite and Sunni candidates.

The protests drew between 1,000 and a few thousand in Mosul, Tikrit, and Samarra—centers of Baathist armed attacks on U.S. and Iraqi government troops and police.

On December 28 the head of the United Nations observers in Iraq gave the election a clean bill of health. But the following day UN officials said an international commission would review 1,500 complaints about the vote.

Welcoming the review, U.S. ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad said, "It is important that the Iraqi people have confidence in the election results." Winning over wealthy Sunnis, who were the backbone of support for Hussein's Baath party-police regime, is a key part of Washington's strategy to isolate and defeat armed Baathist groups and their al-Qaeda allies. In a December 23 press conference in Baghdad to announce that two U.S. brigades scheduled to deploy to Iraq would not be needed, U.S. general George Casey noted that suicide bombings have declined with each of the three elections held over the past year–from over 60 in June to 16 in December.

Meanwhile, according to initial Iraqi government reports, the Shiite-led United Iraqi Alliance won 58 percent of the vote in Iraq's largest province, Baghdad. The Iraqi Accord Front, the largest Sunni-led bloc, came in second there with nearly 19 percent and won in four provinces where Sunni Arabs are the majority. In Anbar province, a current center of U.S. military operations that borders Syria, the Front reportedly got 73 percent of the vote.

The Kurdistan Alliance led in four northern provinces, including Tamim, which encompasses the oil-rich regions around Kirkuk. It is expected to win some 55 of the 275 National Assembly seats.

Kurds have taken advantage of the overthrow of the Baathist regime by the U.S.-led forces and subsequent imperialist occupation to strengthen their fight for autonomy in the northern provinces. Members of the Kurdish pesh merga militia, which fought against Hussein, are a disproportionately high number of the Iraqi military and police. Interviews by the Knight Ridder news service suggest their number in Iraqi Kurdistan exceeds 10,000. "All of them belong to the central government, but inside they are Kurds," Hamid Afandi, a minister for the pesh merga, told Knight Ridder. "All pesh merga are under the orders of our leadership."

Kurds in Iraq are part of an oppressed nationality, estimated at 25 million, who also live in parts of neighboring Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Armenia.

Profit drive killed miners

Continued from front page

trapped miners had been found alive. The London *Guardian* reported that Joe Thornton, a state official, "told reporters shortly after midnight that the rescued miners were being examined and would be taken to local hospitals." The media nationwide immediately picked up this misinformation. It was splashed on lead headlines of many dailies this morning. But the "miracle" was a lie. Three hours later, ICG CEO Ben Hatfield told the miners' families, "There had been a lack of communication…and only one survived," said John Groves, whose brother Jerry was one of those killed.

"There was no apology. There was no nothing. It was immediately out the door," Nick Helms, son of miner Terry Helms, told the media about Hatfield's announcement.

"They told us our loved ones would be out in an hour and on their way over," Ann Meredith, whose father died in the mine, told the press. "This mine is unfit. They should shut it down."

To protect themselves from the anticipated outrage of miners' relatives, ICG officials, prior to retracting this lie, made sure state troopers and a SWAT team were outside the church where the miners' families were.

John Bennett, whose father was one of the miners killed, told the media his father would "tell me how unsafe the mine is." Problems at the mine had been "going on for months…and they still send men in," he said, adding that if the mine owner had allowed workers to unionize the violations wouldn't have happened, reported MSNBC.

The Sago Mine, which has 145 employees, was operated by Anker West Virginia Mining Co. until November when ICG completed its purchase. The injury rate at this mine in 2004 was three times that of similar-sized underground mines nationwide, said the *Charleston Gazette*. MSHA documents show that the average number of working days lost since 2000 because of accidents at Sago was nearly double the national average.

After its most recent inspections between October and December 2005, MSHA issued 46 citations for safety violations. Immediately after the explosion at the Sago Mine, Eugene Kitts, a company vice president for mining, insisted that these citations were all minor. "We addressed them," he told the *Washington Post*. However, 18 of these violations were listed as "significant and substantial." These included inadequate safeguards against the collapse of the mine roof and inadequate ventilation to guard against the buildup of deadly gases. During the last six months of 2005, the Sago Mine reported a dozen roof falls, according to MSHA records.

After 13 coal miners were killed as a result of two explosions at a Jim Walter Resources mine in Brookwood, Alabama, in 2001, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) president Cecil Roberts said the union had information on hand that the first explosion occurred when a roof fall hit a scoop battery charger, creating a spark that ignited the methane gas.

Fines for safety citations issued against the Sago Mine bosses came to just $24,155 for 2005, with some $14,500 of this paid by the company.

Nationwide, 149 miners were killed in coal mines between 2001 and 2005, with 22 killed last year. But these figures only tell part of the story. In the first nine months of 2005, nearly 3,800 coal miners were injured on the job, according to MSHA; 470 of these were contract workers.

Workers in the area say there are no union mines in Upshur County, where the Sago Mine is located. ICG owns two other mines in the area—Spruce and Sycamore #2—both nonunion. In fact, the company's web site brags that ICG owns "union-free" facilities.

"That whole area used to be union. Mine 105 and Mine 108 were owned by Bethlehem Steel," said Wally Hood, a member of UMWA Local 1949 in Morgantown, West Virginia. "Then the union took more and more concession contracts. It weakened the workers and the union. They were closed down in 1986."

In the early 1980s the Sago Mine was owned by Badger Coal and was organized by the UMWA.

"If it'd been a union mine this never would have happened," Earl Casto, a former miner whose cousin Junior Hamner died at Sago Mine, told ABC News. "This should make all coal miners working open their eyes."

Ryan Scott is a coal miner in Greene County, Pennsylvania. Brian Williams contributed to this article.

New York transit workers

Continued from page 4

nothing. "This was a strike that never needed to happen, and we hope that message reverberates in the future," said an editorial in the December 29 *New York Times.*

As for the fight for dignity on the job, the contract proposal offers only MTA promises to hire a consultant to review the disciplinary system under which bosses wrote up unionists 15,000 times in 2004 alone. Salvador Soto, a bus maintenance worker at Triboro Coach in Queens, said the proposed contract "doesn't do what's needed to change the discipline. They write you up for any little thing." He was one of about 700 workers at the private Jamaica Buses and Triboro Coach—without a contract for three years—who walked out the day before the other Local 100 members. These lines are slated to be taken over by the MTA early this year.

"The MTA is always playing games. It uses the Taylor law to hold us down," said Soto. "But it was right to strike. There was unity. We came back with some kind of pride. We showed we have a voice."

Brian Taylor contributed to this article.